



The Hoosick Street Bridge & The North-South Arterial

Twenty six years of street fighting in Troy, New York

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Introduction

Troy, New York in 2018 is a success story. Bright, ambitious, entrepreneurial young people are coming to buy buildings in which to start their families and their businesses. Transformational projects have been built or rehabilitated in the last 20 years. Most of the early projects were created by developers who were Troy residents or who had Troy roots. Now developers from other areas are buying and renovating important buildings downtown and elsewhere. In 2010, for the first time since 1950, the population of Troy increased. The news is out: Troy is the new hot spot in the Capital Region.

It wasn't always so. Troy has seen sorrier days. Our new and very welcome citizens may not be well informed of the details of the period of decline that preceded this renaissance. It's no wonder. Not much has been written of the forces that pushed Troy over the brink and down the slope over the last 50 plus years.

Why does this matter? It matters because, inevitably, there will be periods of decline in Troy's future too. Maybe sooner, preferably later. How we handle ourselves as a community will determine the severity and extent of the period of decline. Troy does not have a good track record of responding quickly and appropriately. Studying the past is the best way to avoid repeating it.

From 1951 to 2000 the population of Troy went down in every US Census. As the population dwindled and the tax base eroded, the resources were not available for solutions. Naturally, when the Feds or the State of NY put bushels of money on the table, the immediate reaction was to get all we could. The result was a series of inappropriately large solutions that in hindsight did more harm than good.

Troy was busy looking inwardly for the cause of the problem and outwardly for the solutions. This was exactly wrong in both aspects. The problems of the cities were a result of wrong-headed national policies. The plagues that were visited on Troy were not of its own making. They were visited on all our neighboring cities as well. The cities went downhill and the suburbs became the dominant community model. Today, as this is written, the public mood has begun to swing back, and the right answers are only beginning to sprout green from the burned over districts.

This article chronicles the development of two highway projects that promised to resolve the problems of Troy: the North South Arterial, and the Hoosick Street Bridge.

These two projects were a product of funding availability rather than popular demand. In countless urban areas around the country the Interstate Highway system created havoc during its planning and after its construction. When first proposed, they were accepted with an unquestioning stoicism that, in retrospect, appears unhealthy.

The problems that Troy faced were not unique, they were typical. That is why the story is instructive. How Troy behaved was, as always, unique to Troy. That's what makes it interesting. This is what happened to two of the projects proposed for Troy in 1954, and how, twenty six years after they were first proposed one story ended in a puff of smoke, and one ended in a bridge that created more problems than it solved.

1954 through 1966

An idea is funded, and a car nation blooms.

As World War II drew to a close, plans were already well underway to transform America into a car-nation. Oil producers, automobile manufacturers, and road builders leaned heavily on all levels of government to achieve this goal. Even to this day this alliance of industries supports suburban sprawl, dreams up ways to cheat on emissions tests, and works to minimize mileage standards. The supporters of these industries are single minded in their defense of the car culture they have created.

The vision of America as the colossus of roads began well before World War II, but the big bang for the highway lobby came when the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 was passed. America's interstate road system became the largest public works program in history. This bill appropriated \$24.8 billion dollars (\$228 billion in 2018 dollars) for an expanded and expedited National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. Those funds were provided by taxes on vehicles and gas that were funneled into a Highway Trust Fund. The Feds would pay 90% of the cost of an Interstate Highway, creating an avalanche of money that sent planners all over the country scurrying to their maps looking for possible new Interstate highways. Why build a little highway with your own money when you could super-size it with 90% of the cost covered by Uncle Sam? The more that was built, the more gas tax and toll money was generated. The cycle continued and the highways construction continued unchecked. The net result was a grossly overbuilt system. The amount expended on highways between 1957 and 1991 was \$128 billion, of which \$114 billion was federal money.

This was a disproportionately large amount of money allotted, with inadequate consideration of the net effects. Mistakes can be excused, but mistakes of this magnitude should be examined thoroughly. This was a culture-changing disruption of the basic processes of our society. It should have had a more evolutionary development with a deliberative and inclusive planning process. As you will see, this is not at all what happened.

New York State was ahead of the curve. The New York Thruway was a precursor of the highways to come. It was up and running by 1954, part of the post war boom, but not funded by the Federal Highway Act of 1956, even though it was later incorporated into the Interstate System. The Thruway, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike before it, provide a nice contrast to the Interstate

system. The earliest super-highways were primarily funded by state issued bonds that were paid back by the tolls that were charged to the users. (Unfortunately, having paid off the bonds, the tolls are still in place, and steadily rising. They far exceed the maintenance cost and have been diverted by political slight-of- hand to other uses.) Nonetheless, the NYS Thruway was a good thing; it connected the cities of the state without destroying them.

The many roads that grew like tentacles from that main line, however, were inspired and made possible by the 1956 Highway Act. Some of these roads were, like the NYS Thruway, assets to the region. In New York's Capital Region these included the Adirondack Northway, I-90, and the Berkshire Spur, to name but a few. The bad ones were those that were woefully overdesigned, like I 88 or carved through cities, like I-81 and I-690 in Syracuse. The very worst were those that ended at the border and dumped traffic into cities unequipped for the speed or the volume.

Around the country, initial resistance to the highways proposed in the late 1950's was mostly non-existent or ineffective. The most notable exception, of course was in Greenwich Village in New York City, where Jane Jacobs began her legendary fight against highways proposed by Robert Moses. Ultimately, the roads were stopped and in 1961, Jacobs' landmark book Death and Life of the Great American Cities was published. It was an indictment of highway mentality and a brilliant defense of urban living that was instrumental in changing the public image of highways. It was by far the most effective example of successful resistance.

The Highway Boom hits Troy

The history of the Hoosick Street Bridge and the North South Arterial can be traced to concepts going back at least to 1944, when the New York State Department of Public Works (NYSDPW) obtained authorization to prepare master plans and construct arterial highways within the State's cities. The NYSDPW was the forerunner of the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).

On March 19, 1954 the first real punch was thrown in the 26 year street fight over the Bridge and Arterial projects. That was the day these two projects, among several others, were introduced to the public at a meeting held at Sage Hall on the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute campus.

Two articles about the meeting appeared the next day in the Troy Record; a side piece, *Project Designed to Ease Traffic*, by Herbert A. Calkins, and *State Proposes \$43,118,000 Highway*

System in Troy Area, by Joseph A. Parker. (\$43.1 million in 1954 dollars is equal to \$396.4 million in 2018 dollars.)

The meeting covered projects proposed for Troy, Green Island, Watervliet, and Cohoes. The Troy projects totaled \$20,102,000 (47% of the total).

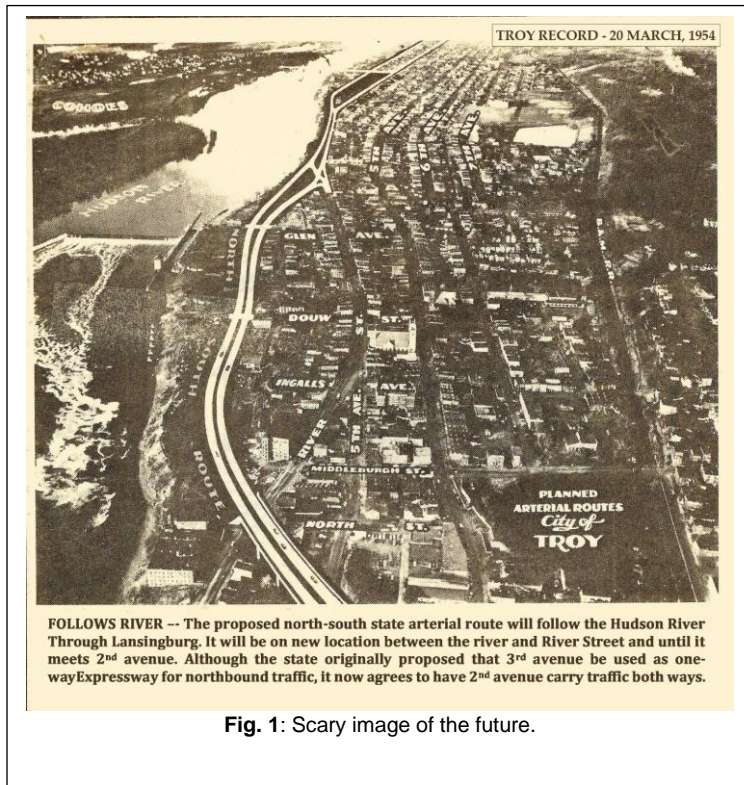


Fig. 1: Scary image of the future.

Most of the Troy coverage concerned the Troy North-South Arterial (NSA). The route was characterized as a “semi-expressway.” It was proposed to run the length of the city, entering over the Menands Bridge at the south end, essentially following the base of the hill northward through South Troy and downtown to Rensselaer Street and Sixth. It featured a mix of elevated roads, existing streets and tunnels. At Rensselaer and Sixth, it would turn northwest, cutting diagonally across blocks on an elevated roadway over Fifth Avenue and River Street until it

reached the river bank at grade near Middleburgh Street. There it would turn to again continue north along the bank of the river. When it reached Lansingburgh, the north and south lanes would split to convert existing avenues to “semi-expressways” (a term used in the Record article): north bound traffic shunted onto 3rd Avenue, south bound traffic onto 2nd Avenue. That road paring would continue to the City line and merge onto Route 4 in Pleasantdale.

The Arterials proposed for the Capital Region in 1944 were intended to remove through-traffic from city streets in order to ease congestion, especially in downtowns. The NSA, however, didn’t circumvent city streets as arterials were meant to; it proposed to obliterate them along a winding corridor from the south to the north end of Troy. It would have turned that corridor into a highway, with a staggering loss of structure, safety and scale in the process. It also would have run along the riverfront for a good portion of its length. This would have cut parts of Troy off from the

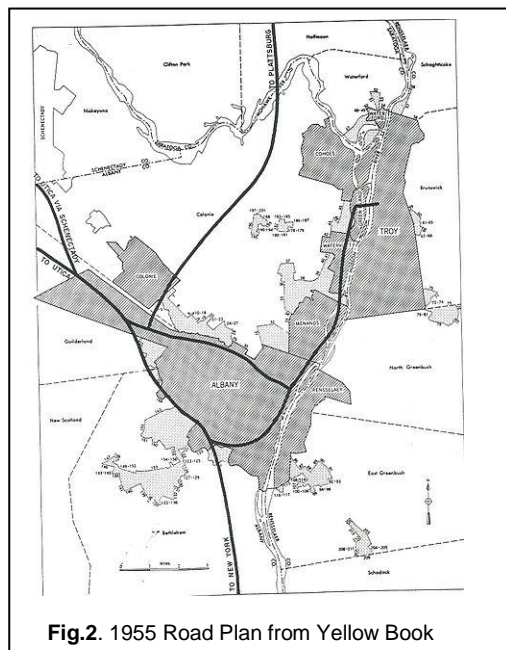
Riverfront, which is just what happened in Albany, Menands, and Watervliet when their arterial evolved into I-787.

Usually when a mammoth public works project is proposed, there is a genuine purpose that provides the rationale for the project. It helps rally part of the fair-minded population to the cause, and gives welcome cover to those who are about to make boatloads of money from the project. The Hoosick Street Bridge, had a cover story. The North-South Arterial didn't.

Many people assume that I-787 was originally proposed for the Troy side of the Hudson. That is not correct. Both the NSA and I-787 were proposed at the meeting in 1954. The need for a north south road through Troy was never urgent. From the very beginning, a parallel road, I-787, was proposed across the river at the same time. The NSA made no sense at all.

In 1954, the Arterial was the big project, the bridge seemed to be an afterthought. There is only a brief paragraph in the 1954 article describing upgrades proposed for Hoosick Street to the City Line, and a new bridge.

The following year, a sketch from the United States Department of Transportation's (US DOT) 1955 Yellow Book shows a bridge crossing from Green Island in line with Hoosick Street on the Troy side. (it's that little jab into the underbelly of Troy on the right side of Fig. 2.) The plan also showed the bridge coming off a route recognizable as today's I-787. Interestingly, the Troy North South Arterial was not pictured.



Earlier, I wrote that the Hoosick Street Bridge had a legitimate cover-story. It was a remedy for a very real problem. Back in 1950's Route 7 crossed into Troy via the old Congress Street Bridge. From there it followed a convoluted path through downtown Troy. The result was that Troy was hopelessly congested with cars passing through on their way to other places. The idea was to build a new bridge to get vehicles out of downtown that were headed elsewhere. Traffic congestion was a legitimate concern and lessening it would have been good for Troy if reasonably designed.

Back when the bridge was first conceived of as a local bridge, a reasonable design was a possibility. For example, it might have been built as a four-lane replacement for the old Green Island Bridge relocated to Hoosick Street. It could have accessed I 787 as easily as the current Green Island Bridge feeds into I 787 now. Then they could have demolished the old bridge before it collapsed into the Hudson, which it did in 1977. Would it have moved as many cars as the bridge they ultimately built? No. But on the other hand Hoosick Street wouldn't be as congested as it is now, and the cost to the State of New York and Troy's local share, would have been reduced, along with avoiding the many problems caused by the bridge as it was built.

Nothing like that was ever considered, because the context of road building in America changed dramatically. The chance for a reasonable bridge project evaporated. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 was passed, and all hope for a thoughtful, deliberate process was crushed under an avalanche of money.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 appropriated \$24.8 billion dollars (\$228 billion in 2018 dollars) for an expanded and expedited National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. Federal money was available to pay 90% of the cost of Interstate Highways. Suddenly, the NYSDPW, and State Highway Agencies all over the country wanted interstate highways built wherever they could get the locality to agree. Interstate Highways were seen as the key to converting dying cities into thriving suburbs, which was considered a good thing at the time.

This was the miracle-grow fertilizer that changed the scope of the project. The lure of 90% Federal money completely changed the thinking about the Hoosick Street Bridge and the interchange with the proposed Arterial. The effect on the two projects was obvious.

The Arterial was not eligible for interstate funding. Arterial projects were constructed with half Federal Government and half State funding. In addition, the State and the municipalities split the cost of acquiring the right of way. Troy's share of this cost was estimated at \$3,971,500. New York State would be paying more than half the cost of the arterial, but only 10% of the cost of the Hoosick Street Bridge.

The HSB had become the dominant project. The NSA was no longer the biggest kid on the block. The plans that were presented to the public eight years after the initial meeting were significantly different.

The 1962 Corridor Hearings

For some reason the two projects dropped from sight for the next eight years. It was clear that the NYSDPW, the agency then in charge of building highways, was very busy with bigger projects at the time. Between 1954 and 1962 Highways were being constructed on a massive scale throughout the state and the country. The Troy Arterial may have just been lost in the shuffle for a while. Perhaps all of the projects were being redesigned to maximize the amount of Interstate Highways being proposed.

After an eight-year hiatus, the NSA again reared its head on August 15, 1962 when a Corridor Public Hearing was held in Green Island. A Corridor Hearing is meant to broadly define a path within which the road would be built. At that time only one hearing was required. The hearing did not go well for the State. By this time opposition was beginning to appear. Mayor McNulty of Green Island and Mayor Donnelly of Watervliet both voiced and filed written “unalterable objections” to the projects proposed for their communities. This was the first time the citizens of Maplewood heard that nearly half of their community would be taken in order to construct the Maplewood Interchange, a gargantuan clover leaf between the two proposed highways and the bridge across to Troy. Madeline Whatley, a teacher at the Heatly School whose home was taken for the interchange, recalled that 1962 meeting in a Times Record article printed fourteen years later, “It was like a bomb went off. Everyone was in such a state of shock they couldn't comprehend it. We were like so many zombies.”

In Troy, their one hearing focused on the Arterial, but did not resolve the issue either. There were more proponents than opponents, but even the local proponents varied in their corridor preferences. Troy could not achieve consensus on a corridor location.

Gary Nelson, a Bridge and Arterial opponent, notes that throughout the controversy the opponents were blamed for the decades long delay in resolving these issues. Gary points to a series of delays caused simply by NYSDOT inaction after each step in the process. It was not local opponents who waited ten years between concept and public announcement. Nor did opponents cause the eight-year gap between public announcement and Corridor Hearing. One might call them unforced errors. The biggest error was inherent in the proposal; pushing a destructive highway through an existing city street grid. It was the flaws in this concept that prevented rapid approval of the projects.

Thanks, that's All the Public Input We Need

Apparently the hearings in Troy and Green Island satisfied the requirements for public participation as they were at the time. Armed with those two hearings and despite strenuous objections from both communities, the NYS DPW began the process of acquiring properties.

Six years later, in 1968, the road on the west side of the Hudson passed a milestone. The Watervliet City Council approved resolutions guaranteeing NYS the right-of-way for the road. Governor Rockefeller announced the awarding of \$12.5 million to construct I-787 from the Patroon Island Bridge to Watervliet. Including 3 miles of highway and 8 miles of ramp. Most of the ramps presumably were intended for the Maplewood interchange. The work was scheduled for a 1971 completion. Slowly, but inexorably, the pieces were falling into place.

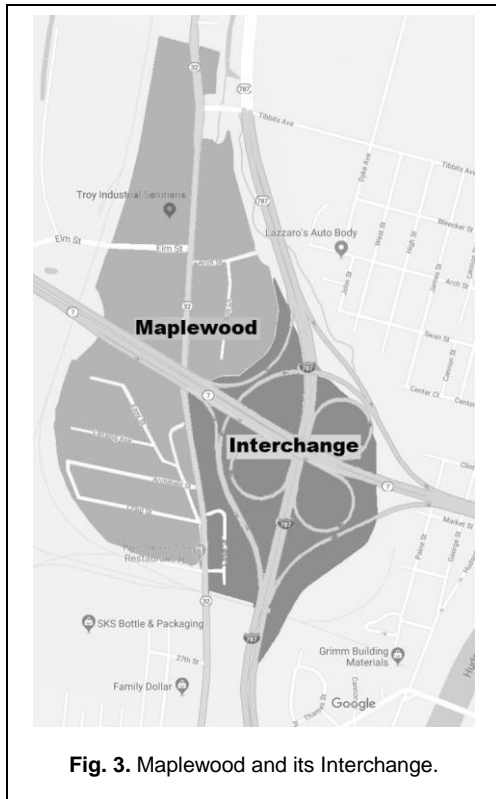
1967 through 1974:

The indecision continues, yet acquisition and demolitions begin.

1967 was the year that the NYSDPW was joined with other agencies to become the new Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). It was also the year that actual acquisition of homes and businesses in certain parts of the Troy corridor and in Maplewood began, even though the final location had not yet been determined. The west side of Eighth Street between Hoosick and Jacob, and several whole blocks of Little Italy around Haverman's Avenue near the C.R.A.B. club were acquired¹. Both areas were working class neighborhoods. The Haverman's Avenue area was part of Little Italy and many owner-occupied homes that had been in families for generations were lost. The Eighth Street area was a more diverse community, and included working families, students and fraternities.

Maplewood was the hardest hit. A thousand words would not be enough, so here is a picture (Fig.3):

¹ C.R.A.B Post 1954 was established in memory of Troy veterans Chicarelli, Rea, Agars and Bevevino. It was, and is, a South Troy landmark. It's still there. Had the Arterial been built, it would have been demolished.



These communities had no developed defense mechanisms to fight this decision. The 90/10 Federal money seduced local officials, just as it had the State Department of Transportation. Highway funds were seen as the shot in the arm that could inoculate cities against the forces threatening their stability. The cities were continuing their post-war declines in population, average income, and educational levels. Urban infrastructure was beginning to show the signs of age. The suburban model seemed the wave of the future. City officials saw highway money and urban renewal as a chance to join the automobile based society.

The money had hit the streets, but the regulations necessary to avoid excess were not yet in place. As a result, a system armed with bulldozers and run by skilled bureaucrats obliterated two defenseless

neighborhoods in Troy and one in Green Island.

A Small Group of Thoughtful, Committed, Troy Citizens Objects

As the newly created NYSDOT began sending out 90-day notices to homeowners in Troy, a new element was heard from – the Troy opposition. The reaction was vehement on both sides. The majority of public officials and civic groups supported the proposed arterial. Little by little, however, other voices began to be heard. Naturally it started with the people who got the eviction notices. They formed an effective group called Hillside Neighbors in Opposition to the Road. Their activities widened the circle of opponents to include many of their council people, and ultimately residents of surrounding communities. People began to object. Petitions were signed. Questions were raised about the wisdom of running a highway through the City.

The acquisition process was not pretty, which generated even more opposition. Theoretically, the homeowners were paid fair market value, but in fact were told that the area was marked for demolition and this was a take-it or leave it offer. I have been told that no third party appraisals were involved. People sold buildings that they owned but were not given the money they would need to buy homes of equivalent value. Many former home owners became renters for the rest of

their lives. The areas slowly evacuated; as people left, the buildings began to deteriorate. The last few people were faced with a *fait accompli*; their neighborhood was dead. Getting out was their only option. Really it had been from the start.

A couple of years after the Hillside Neighbors formed, a group of RPI students and faculty, came together to create the community design center TAP², and offered to work with Hillside Neighbors to redesign the roadway. Vince Lepera, TAP's first Board President remembers that:

Fighting acquisitions was before my time. It was well along and ongoing in the late 60's so a fight seemed hopeless. The arterial likewise was a political given ... We saw it as stupid highway planning and incompetent from a geologic standpoint.

The students and the neighborhood worked together. In the end, the State acquired what it wanted, but the insanity of the plan was beginning to show. TAP put together an alternative, that would have rerouted the North South Arterial to minimize building removals. TAP's proposed plan reduced the NYSDOT proposal from 469 buildings demolished to 64. It reduced families displaced from 650 to 78, and reduced total acreage from 68.5 to 18.7. It included a bridge that fed into Middleburg Street as opposed to the NYSDOT's proposal to feed traffic into Hoosick.

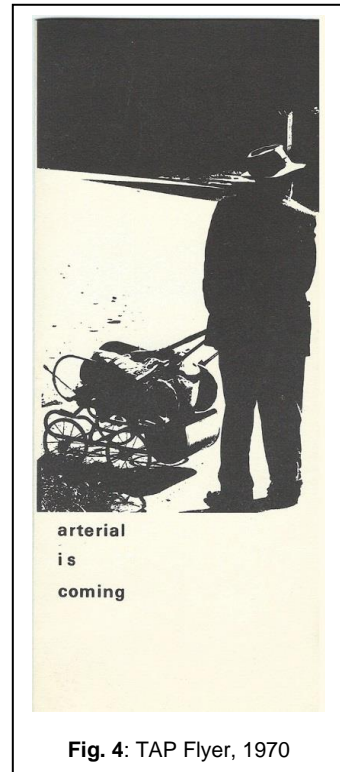


Fig. 4: TAP Flyer, 1970

One Family's Story of Appropriation.

In 1946 Michael and Antoinette Esposito purchased the building at 7 St. Mary's Avenue from Mary Foley. The Foley family had owned the building since 1874. The sale was but one of many individual steps that changed Tory Hill, a predominantly Irish neighborhood, into Little Italy, center of Troy's developing Italian community.

The Espositos repaired and rented the building before moving in 1949 with their three children, Michael, Nancy and Carmella. Sadly, Michael Esposito Sr. passed away the year after the

² TAP is a community based organization first proposed as a thesis project by RPI student Vincent Lepera in 1968. Over the years, although the organization changed the name several times, each name could be abbreviated as "TAP". It was incorporated in April of 1969 as a not-for-profit corporation under the name TAP, Inc. It will be referred to as "TAP" throughout this paper.

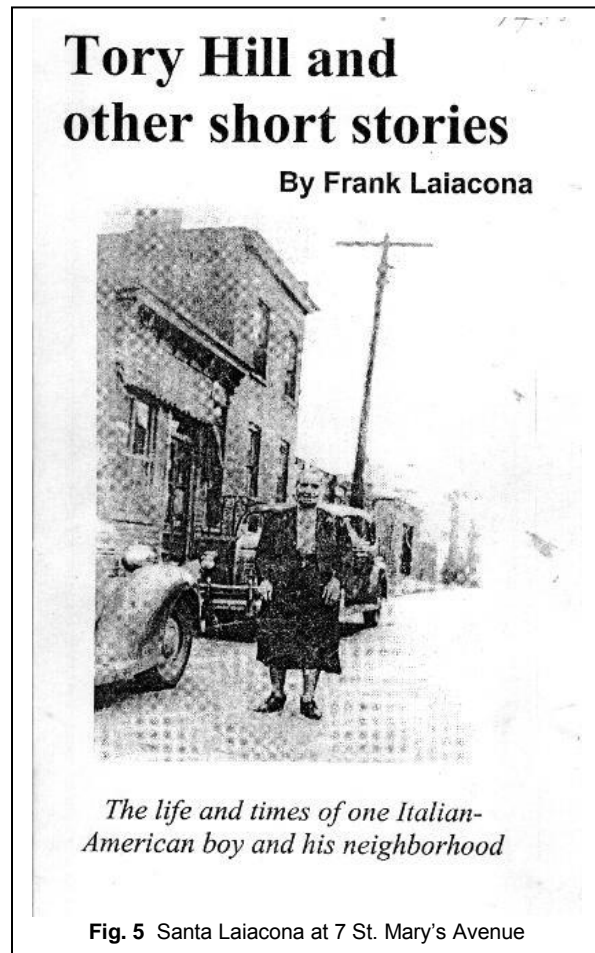
building was purchased, and Antoinette was left to raise her three children as a single parent. Antoinette returned to work at the Tiny Togs clothing factory, where she had worked before she was married. They had become an integral part of a special corner of Troy's Little Italy community. The network of grandmothers in the neighborhood helped to provide child care. For 13 years they lived happily in their hillside home. Life was not easy, but it was enjoyable, until the day in 1962 they were notified of a meeting to discuss the location of a highway that had first been proposed years earlier. Shortly afterward, a crew came to drill test borings on Haverman's Avenue, the street just behind them.

Everyone in the neighborhood knew there was an old proposal to run a road through the neighborhood, but nothing had been heard about it for eight years. By the time people from New York State came to discuss buying their house, young Michael was in the Army (1963 to 1965), and, at first, Antoinette and her daughters had to negotiate without him. In April of 1969, after twenty years in the building, the Espositos received a "Notice of Appropriation" from the state of New York. There followed an unfriendly and high handed negotiation regarding sale. Michael Esposito remembers being treated unfairly and a clear sense of disrespect for the neighborhood and the residents. The first offer for the property was made, \$5,700, with \$1,500 allowed for other expenses. The total was \$7,200. Antoinette, shocked, asked angrily, "That's it?" The man from the State replied, "Look at this neighborhood; it's a mess." The state would not acknowledge that their road proposal in 1954, and the hearing in 1962, had not helped maintaining property values. As the State began to buy property they made matters worse by acquiring and abandoning the properties. They didn't tear them down, and they didn't keep them secured.

The Esposito property should have been worth more than the typical house on that block. In an area of primarily 25 foot wide lots, the Esposito's property was unusually large at 90 feet wide by 100 feet long. It contained a two story house, an adjacent store which had been converted to expand the residence, a five car garage, a two car garage, and an expansive backyard with gardens and fruit trees. When this was pointed out to the man from the State, he said, "You're not going to go buy a property with all that. You don't need more than \$7,200". The family insisted that they wanted the value of what the State was taking from them, but he wouldn't hear of it.

Antoinette hired local attorney Jim Brearton who managed to get the family an additional \$1,800. They purchased a three story building on Third Street six blocks from their old home.

The building needed a lot of work, and the payment didn't even cover the purchase cost of the building. They lost their little hillside village, moved to a smaller lot without the income from the five car garage, lost considerable cash on the transaction, and were insulted by the process. Their experience was not unique.



While the new house was being renovated, the state charged the Espositos rent to stay in their old house. Michael Esposito, back from the service remembered the day they left the house at 7 St. Mary's Avenue as the worst moment of the entire ordeal. Antoinette started walking down the hill toward their new home, when from behind her she heard Santa Laiacona, who lived just a bit up the hill from St. Mary's Avenue, sitting on her front stoop, openly weeping. Santa, then in her eighties, called to Antoinette in Italian, "Antonetta, Why have they done this to us? What is going on?" Antoinette did not look back, or answer her. When she got to the new house she told Michael about Santa on the stoop. Michael asked her why she hadn't stopped. She replied, "If I stop, I am going to start to cry, and if I start, I don't know if I will ever stop."

Ralph DeSantis, Troy's City Manager sent the family a letter dated July, 1971. It said he was informed at a meeting with the Department of Transportation, that the State would not be taking any additional property for the north-south arterial between Ferry Street and the Menands Bridge. The letter did not say the project was dead, although by then it surely was.

1968: The Bridge Blossoms into a Clover Leaf.

By 1968, the North-South Arterial, was among the walking dead. I-787 was under construction, and just about to link up with the completed Maplewood interchange. Everything was ready to

pump traffic onto the new bridge. Furthermore, it was an open secret that another highway would be coming along soon to add even more traffic to the proposed clover leaf: Alternate Route 7 from Latham.

Later that year, the NYS DOT unveiled their latest version of the project, with a major change in plans: the Bridge was now significantly wider. The plans were still in the concept stage, but the concept had mushroomed. The latest proposal was a monster with an eight-lane body and giant tentacle ramps to handle the flow and the movements of a full high-speed interchange between an Interstate Highway and major urban arterial.

Was the Hoosick Street Bridge overdesigned? Were eight lanes too many? By way of comparison, the old Tappan Zee Bridge had six lanes. To put the project in context, it is worth pausing to list a few cities on the Hudson River, along with the number of vehicular bridges and the total lanes of traffic on the bridges in those communities as they are today, in 2018:

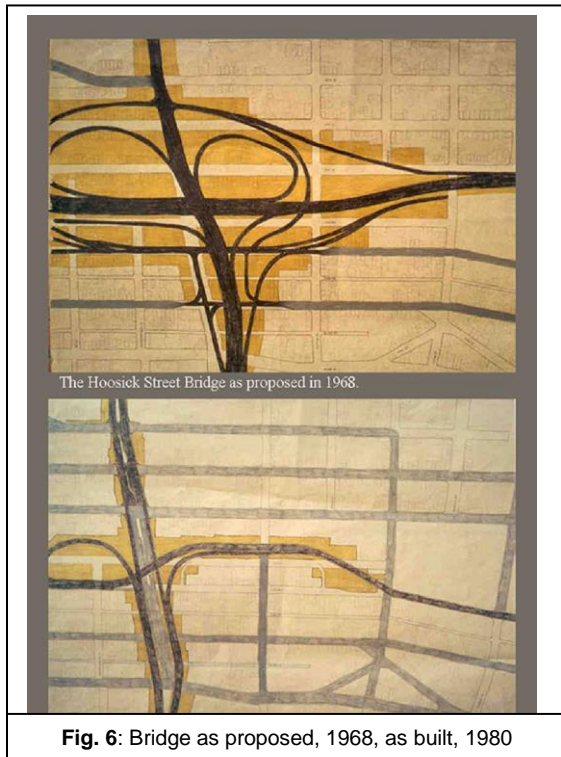
Glens Falls has one bridge with four Lanes (as do several other cities). Albany has two bridges with fourteen lanes total. The new Tappan Zee Bridge, connecting Tarrytown and South Nyack has eight lanes. New York City (170 times larger than Troy) has one vehicular bridge across the Hudson , the George Washington, with a total of fourteen lanes. With the addition of the Hoosick Street Bridge in 1980, Troy, with a total population of 50,000, has six bridges across the Hudson with a total of **twenty-four traffic lanes**.

Troy has more vehicular bridges and more lanes of traffic across the Hudson River than any other city in New York State.

The NYSDOT gamely tried to explain that the bridge wasn't really eight lanes. Those lanes were merely there to allow the incoming traffic from I 787 to change lanes in the short span of time before they were dumped into Troy at 8th Street. But four lanes to the east and four lanes to the west still adds up to eight. They failed to realize that their rationalizations just proved the point that the entire project was ill-conceived and overblown.

Today, the Hoosick Street Bridge, as built in 1980, crosses the river into Troy, ending with a thud at the foot of a steep uphill climb. Welcome back to city streets. There are two stoplights at two major at-grade intersections within 550 feet of that landing. I liken it to a sewage system that carefully piped sewage away from one area, and then dumped its content, with no mitigation, into someone else's backyard.

When the shift in plan hit the fan, the result was a public relations disaster. It was a monster interchange designed to facilitate high speed interchanges between a highway and an eight lane bridge. Given the congested mess that is lower Hoosick Street today, one shudders to imagine how much worse it would have been had that interchange been built as proposed.



Take a moment to look at Fig. 6 adjacent. The upper drawing shows the 1968 proposal. The lower drawing shows the Bridge as completed in 1980. The yellow areas show the zone of destruction: the areas required to be cleared to complete the projects. As proposed in 1968, it would have obliterated the most distressed area of Troy. It ran, not through, like a knife wound, but all over the neighborhood, like carpet bombing. In plan, it even looks a little like a mushroom cloud

This was a product of road planning through the path of least resistance. Only in a disadvantaged neighborhood could such an oversized project be proposed. The obliteration of the neighborhood may not have been intentional, but it might as well have been. It was representative of the roadbuilding

of the time, callous in its planning, high-handed in its execution, and unrelieved in its effect. Constantine Doxiadis, an internationally known planner who was working on RPI's campus plan at the time, saw the plan of the bridge and called it "a criminal use of urban land." The design was inexcusable, but the juggernaut was rolling, and the first casualty to be crushed was thoughtful reflection.

The Battle on the Arterial Heats Up

After the 1968 version went public, the controversy raged hot and heavy. NYSDOT, still tinkering with the design of the arterial, created a variety of proposed routes for the corridor. All of them shared a common feature; a considerable swath would have to be cut through Troy to accommodate their plans. TAP developed alternatives which accepted the planned roads but located them so as to minimize the carnage.

In February of 1970, Bob Mitchell, then Vice President of TAP, Inc. in testimony before Congressman Dan Button, estimated that between 850 and 1200 families would be dislocated. It was not determined precisely which buildings would need to be demolished along this entire route, but it was certain to be a big job. It would have cut Troy off from the river just like I-787 cuts off Albany to this day.

By May of 1970, support was building for reexamining the road corridor. The call for restudy was endorsed by the Troy City Council, the Rensselaer County Planning Board, the Rensselaer County Legislature, the Albany County Planning Board, Capital District Regional Planning Commission, the Town of Colonie Planner, the Mayor of Green Island, the League of Women Voters. TAP even convinced the Troy Planning Commission to rescind an earlier resolution and vote to evaluate the TAP proposal. Vince Lepera, Bob Mitchell, and Duncan Barrett, all TAP volunteers, led the work of recruiting public support.

Despite the growing doubts about the road, Troy's leaders continued to look at its problems as a by-product of its failure to suburbanize. In 1971 the concept of a \$96 million dollar make over for Downtown Troy was announced. It involved complete clearing of several blocks of downtown to make way for a suburban-style mall. The downtown mall further complicated and delayed the North South Arterial, as the State and the City administration negotiated further changes to the road alignment. The City now wanted the arterial to facilitate car traffic into downtown. This was a complete reversal of the original concept of the arterial, which was to remove automobile congestion from downtown.

Changes were made to accommodate the proposed mall. Other more significant changes were also proposed around this time. Out of the blue, NYS DOT began talking about an Arterial which would begin at the Menands Bridge as originally proposed, but would now end at Hoosick Street instead of traversing the entire seven-and-a-half-mile length of Troy. The plans for the arterial to run the full North/South length of Troy had been truncated. This was another blow to the road. If a "semi-highway" through Troy was pointless, then one through half of Troy was twice as indefensible.

So why was the NYSDOT clinging so tenaciously to this idea? Remember that the Highway Act only funded 90% of the cost. Given the magnitude of the spending, coming up with 10% of the total was no small feat. The State needed public approval for a series of Bond Acts to get the money. To pass those Acts, the State was using the old bait and switch: promise a bunch of roads that will be built if the bond act passes, then only build some of them. Then, when the next bond

act comes up, promise them again. Bob Fusco described exactly that in the June 16, 1971 issue of the Times Record:

...Gov. Rockefeller can be expected to begin gearing up soon for another “campaign” on behalf of his \$2.5 billion transportation bond issue. This should correctly be referred to as Transportation Bond Issue No. 2. The first was approved in a statewide referendum in 1967.

When the state administration starts grinding out supporting memoranda, listing local highway projects that will be financed by the new bond issue, (if approved; next November) someone had better make certain the promise makers don’t stumble over themselves in Troy.

Specifically:

The North-South Arterial segments from Menands Bridge to Ferry Street and from Ferry Street to Hoosick Street: Cost - \$11.5 million;

The East-West Arterial from the North- South Arterial to Campbell Avenue: Cost - \$2 million;

The Congress Street Arterial from the North-South Arterial to the area of 15th Street and College Avenue: Cost - \$3 million;

The Hoosick Street Bridge, to carry traffic from the Riverfront Arterial in Maplewood up to the intersection of 10th and Hoosick Streets: Cost - \$16 million;

The new Congress Street Bridge. Cost: \$3.9 million. What do these projects have in common?

They involve the major highway construction promised five years ago for the City of Troy. Each was to have been financed in the governor’s “five-year plan” from his first \$2.5 billion transportation bond issue, approved as we said in 1967.

Except for the Congress Street Bridge, the projects have another commonality – they haven’t come to fruition.

(sic)

The Backlash to the Highway Frenzy Prompts Regulation

Throughout the country it had become evident that highway construction was getting out of hand, especially in New York State. I remember Johnny Carson in a monologue, satirically reporting

that New York's Governor Rockefeller had just announced a plan to acquire Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Idaho and Washington State to build a 100 lane highway across the country.

The public reaction to the highway-building frenzy resulted in both Federal and New York State environmental and procedural laws. The strong-arm behaviors of road builders between 1956 and 1969 gave rise to three regulatory bills that curbed the no-holds-barred highway building that preceded them. A fourth law, New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act (enacted in 1975) further brought openness, reflection, and environmental concern to the process. The first three laws, while passed too late to impact the inequities of the early years of the project, had a substantial effect on the behavior of NYS DOT during the remaining years of the battle.

Two of the three new laws limited the freewheeling design and acquisition habits of roadbuilders.

New York State upped the need for one public hearing on the corridor. Beginning in 1969 it would require two hearings; one on the corridor and one on the design. Unfortunately, this did not affect areas like Little Italy that were already being acquired, even though they never had a design hearing.

The Federal Uniform Relocation Act of 1970, made highway design more deliberative, highway acquisition more equitable and public input more essential to approval. The Relocation Act made many of the State's past actions in acquiring property from Troy and Maplewood residents in the late 1960's illegal in the future. Sadly, this came too late for the North South Arterial homes that were already purchased.

Of the three laws, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1969, and signed into law in 1970, was the most significant. The purpose of NEPA is to promote informed decision-making by federal agencies by making "detailed information concerning significant environmental impacts" available to both agency leaders and the public. And the most important tool that NEPA used was the Environmental Impact Statement. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) quickly became the rule book a concerned public got to throw at federally funded construction projects.

Opponents had a new tool. Henceforth when a project was successfully beaten back, it was usually accomplished by attacking deficiencies in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Highway Proponents Finesse the Regulations

In 1972, NEPA was only in its third year when NYSDOT produced the first draft of the EIS for the Hoosick Street Bridge and Arterial. This was a relatively new regulation, and the road builders of America had already figured ways to lessen its impact. In simplest terms, they analyzed the impact of a series of links, but never addressed the impacts of creating a chain. They built the highways in small pieces, so they never had to justify the full scope or the impacts of the full project. This they called “segmentation.”

According to the first draft of the EIS and all subsequent versions, the effects of the Hoosick Street bridge ended where the construction ended; at Hoosick and 10th Streets. No consideration was given to what it would do to Route 7 from Troy, on through Brunswick and other towns in Rensselaer County until it got to Vermont. Not a word about how it would change the very nature of the towns along route 40 which headed north through troy and out into the rest of Rensselaer County.

Whatever else anyone might say to justify this project, it cannot be denied that the Environmental Impact Statement totally misrepresented the effects of this project. It ignored the consequences of the project because they wanted it built as large and as quickly as possible. The authors did not want to think about alternatives, or modifications. Their story of the Hoosick Street Bridge is but one link in a chain that reached from the Northway to Vermont, and one more example of the web of fabrications that those who stand to benefit concoct to justify their otherwise untenable proposals.

Now, in 2018, fifty years later, those who drive up Congress or Middleburgh Street in an effort to avoid Hoosick Street for as long as possible, should understand that the mess that was created was entirely predictable. It was, in fact, predicted. The Department of Transportation and the Court System chose not to open their eyes and do something about it.

The strangle-hold that institutional groups had on this project never allowed for a careful analysis of more effective and efficient solutions. This is all too symptomatic of attitudes of roadbuilders at that time.

Alternates as Simple as A, B, C

In 1972 the Department of Transportation unveiled yet another version of the Hoosick Street Bridge to the public. This time there were three alternates, none of which included any vestige of the North South Arterial. This was the proposal on which the NYSDOT based its first draft EIS.

The outrage that greeted the 1968 proposal had proven decisive, the bridge design had undergone a drastic change. Several ramps were no longer needed, and the enormous interchange, (shown in Fig. 6) proposed four years earlier, was substantially reduced. The North South Arterial had vanished from the proposal, even though there was no public announcement of its demise. It was a big victory for the opponents of the arterial.

The two sides, were far from seeing things eye to eye, and instead still stood nose to nose ready to duke it out over this latest version of the Hoosick Street Bridge. The bridge, despite everything around it being downsized, remained eight lanes wide and still deposited heavy, high speed traffic onto an inadequately prepared Hoosick Street. The end was nearing, but consensus was as elusive as ever.³

On April 3, 1973 the Department of Transportation held a public hearing on this latest version of the Hoosick Street Bridge. The details of the three plans received scant comment. The general feeling was that Plan C was the preferred choice among the three. The City of Troy suggested modifications to Plan C which generated a fourth choice, CR-1. It was the preferred choice among proponents and the least objectionable to the opponents.

Although there was a loose consensus on which of the alternatives was best, there were many strong critiques of the EIS. Many felt that there needed to be further and more fundamental change to the bridge as proposed. The eight lane bridge and the need for massive on and off ramps were derided in many comments. A call for an evaluation of the proposal as a regional system were common. Demand for more fundamental alternatives was frequent.

This first draft was rejected by the Feds. Their rejection echoed many of the criticisms.

In 1974 a Second Draft Environmental Impact Statement was issued. It included some modifications but ignored many of the public comments received on the first draft. Draft 2, in turn, received many criticisms on scale and scope. Like the first draft, it was not acceptable to Federal reviewers.

³ It was just about this time, late 1972, that I began work as TAP's Executive Director and became an active participant in the fight against the proposed Hoosick Street Bridge.

Once Again Demolition Precedes Approval

In December of 1974, the same year that the Second Draft EIS was produced, and later rejected by the Feds, NYSDOT began to demolish buildings along Hoosick Street in anticipation of approval. Apparently, they had learned nothing from the pointless destruction of two neighborhoods for the Arterial that would never be built.⁴

Who was being displaced? From the NYS DOT's own environmental impact statement:

In the Troy Area the average yearly income of the affected census tracts ranges from a low of \$7,190 to a high of \$8,110. Most of the affected families live in rental apartments. The Negro population (of this area) is 18% as compared to 5% for the City of Troy.

The Bridge was a project that would be rejected as proposed by three Federal reviews, and take six more years before it was built. Nonetheless, the NYS DOT did not hesitate to destroy a main commercial corridor and displace a considerable portion of Troy's minority residents.

State officials and local proponents trotted out the argument one more time that the road should be built because it had advanced so far already. The NYSDOT and the project supporters continue to blame the delays on those who objected to the plans as proposed. I will admit, that the only hope opponents had was to win by attrition. The delays served our objectives. After all, we had essentially killed the North South Arterial by continually pressing for a fuller hearing, and winning over a substantial following as the facts came out. So yes, we applauded the delays.

To say, however, that the delays were the fault of the opponents was a specious argument. The opponents had no control of the pacing, and no ability to delay or stop this project. Only the Federal reviewers had the authority. Only their approval was required. The delays were caused by the NYSDOT's flawed initial concepts, their inertia in modifying proposals, and their reluctance to even discuss meaningful alternatives. That was what caused Federal reviewers to reject the EIS three times and to severely question it even in its final form.

The first two decades of the Troy Highway saga were over. The climactic final rounds were about to begin.

⁴ 1974 was also the year that work on the Troy Mall began. Work in this case being the demolition of three blocks in the heart of downtown. The demolition was completed, but the project was halted after six months.

1975

A Bad Year for NYS Department of Transportation



PICTURE THE HOOSICK STREET Bridge crossing the Hudson River from the Maplewood interchange of Interstate 787, at the top, to Hoosick Street in Troy, at the bottom of this aerial photo

taken by The Times Record's C.W. McKeen. Plans for the \$35 million bridge have been stalled again by the Federal Government's request for a

more complete environmental impact statement. Groups in both Green Island and Troy, as well as areas east of the city, are questioning the bridge plans.

TIMES RECORD, 11/25/75

Fig. 7: The \$10 million interchange constructed eight years before the Bridge received its final approval.

The End of an Error

On September 16, 1975 Al Lawrence of the Times Union newspaper reported that the NYSDOT Regional Director, Charles Carlson, announced that a consultant would be hired to study “the north-south transportation corridor”. The article added, “but the consultant is not expected to propose a high speed, limited-access superhighway like the one that was once planned from south Troy to Lansingburgh.” (You may remember that the NSA was originally planned to go through Lansingburgh to the north border of Troy. See fig. 1).

In a Times Record Article by Dennis Nelson, Mr. Carlson suggested that the North-South Arterial “will now run from Congress to Hoosick Street and be a minor Wolf Road type facility.” He added that “Troy’s arterial, once to be a high-speed thoroughfare, has been trimmed to a two-way pair of city streets idea, because I-787 will serve the purpose of getting people quickly from the South Troy Area to the North Troy area.”

As far as I can tell, the North South Arterial has never officially been declared dead. The only report I have found that recommends its demise is dated June 22, 1978 and is titled: “Troy Problem Assessment Report (Draft)”. As to the consultant who was supposed to study the corridor in 1975, the Problem Assessment Report noted “Fiscal constraints and the reduced scale of the project forced the consultant to be undesignated in June of 1976.” Instead, in November of 1977, NYSDOT commissioned the June 22, 1978 report.

On page 17 of that report there is the closest thing I have found to an obituary for the North South Arterial:

This report has attempted to prove, in the previous sections, that no new north-south highway facility is needed in Troy. Therefore, existing need for state property acquired for the Troy North South Arterial must be addressed.

Again, the document was only a draft, but at least it was in writing, “no new north-south highway is needed in Troy.” The road was dead, not with a bang or even a whimper, just gone, like a thief in the night. I am reminded of something said by Moms Mabley, “They shouldn’t say nothin’ about the dead unless it’s good... He’s dead. Good.”

The best part of this story is that none of the Arterial was ever built. The saddest part of this story is that, because the buildings in two neighborhoods were acquired prior to final design approval, the destruction of two neighborhoods, and the substantial expense incurred both by government and residents, was pointless. The homes were acquired in the late sixties and left untended until

they were beyond repair. Ultimately, they were demolished. Among the many buildings lost was one at Ferry Street that had been the home of Samuel Wilson, a Troy meat packer; the very man who was to become Uncle Sam as depicted by Thomas Nast. It was demolished, along with many others in 1971 over the strenuous objection of many Troy citizens.

Much of the land at both locations remains vacant to this day⁵. Oh, what a crying shame.

The Eleventh Hour of the Twenty-First Year

Almost exactly twenty-one years after the news first broke of the proposed Hoosick Street Bridge and the North-South Arterial, City Manager John. Buckley called a March of 1975 meeting designed to allow NYSDOT officials to state their case to committed bridge supporters. The majority of those in the audience were construction workers who would be working on the project. The opposition showed up as well. While it was raucous and memorable, thankfully the confrontation remained verbal, and the result was not likely to have swayed any opinions. Even at this most-contentious show-down, the proponents limited their comments to support for the bridge. There was no outcry at the sudden disappearance of the North-South Arterial.

A third draft Environmental Impact Statement was issued early in 1975. Even without the North-South Arterial it met much the same fate. The third draft of the EIS, like the first two, was disapproved by the Feds.

Regional Director Carlson continued to insist that the bridge was a local project. He was quoted in an article in the Nov. 22, 1975 issue of the Troy Record. “I think what people are looking for is something startling, and it’s not there,” The following year, he was sticking to his story. In 1976 Reporter Dennis Nelson wrote of Carlson “He said the Hoosick Street Bridge is not part of a major plan for the interstate system.”

Figure 8 shows a 2018 image of the corridor from Exit 8 of the Northway in Latham to 10th Street in Troy which shows with startlingly clarity that the road system is clearly regional in concept. The fact that this system continues to the east directly across Rensselaer County and straight into

⁵ Every cloud has a silver lining: a portion of the land which was cleared along Eighth Street was put to excellent use as a community garden by the organization now known as Capital Roots (formerly Capital District Community Gardens).

Vermont makes it more than local, more than regional. It makes it an Interstate; eligible for 90% funding by the Federal Government.

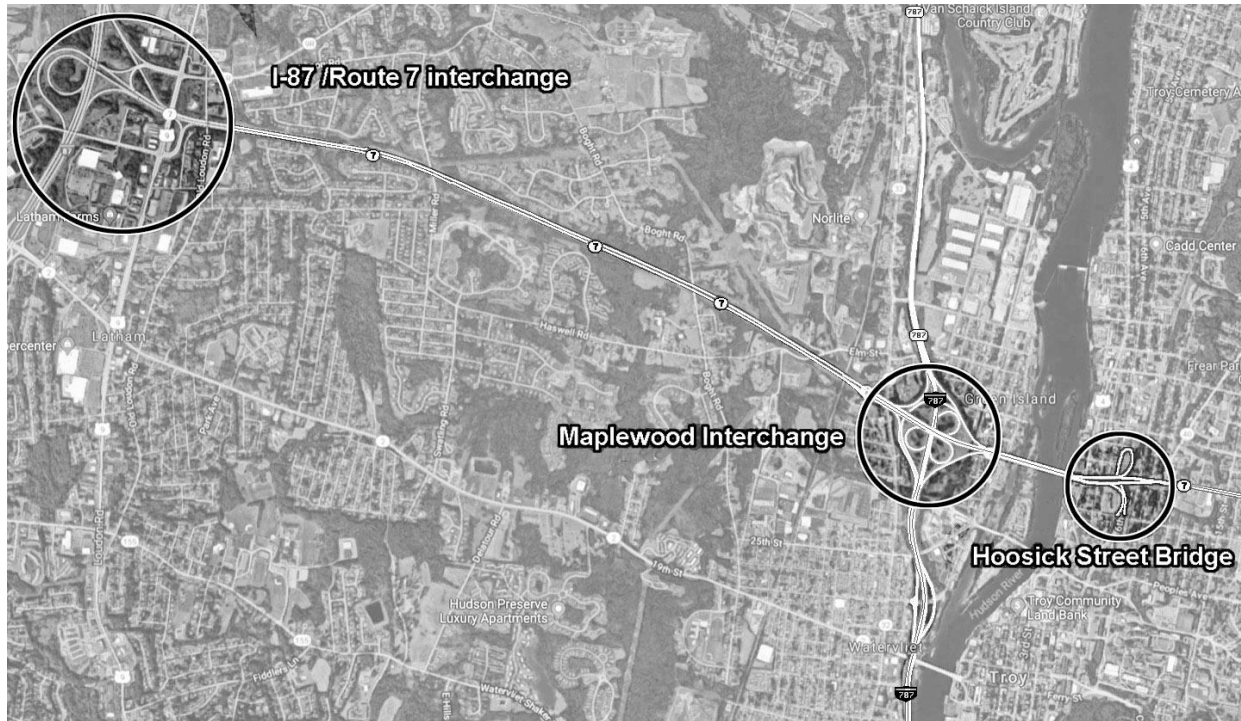


Fig. 8: 2018 Google view of Route 7 from Exit 8 of the Northway to Troy via Hoosick Street Bridge

Things were moving in the right direction for the opponents. People in other communities had objected to the proposed highway system since the Hoosick Street Bridge/North South Arterial cloverleaf was proposed in 1968. Folks in Brunswick and along Route 40 in Schaghticoke were concerned that the increased traffic would create unwanted development pressures on their communities. They rightly saw the bridge proposal for what it was, one piece in a broader plan to “improve” highway traffic through their communities.

“Improve” means to make something better, but in the transportation lingo of those days “improve traffic” always meant “increase traffic” both in speed and in numbers, and whether or not the increase was an improvement in the broader sense, was never questioned.

Isn’t it obvious that bigger roads create more traffic? It certainly has been shown over and over that highways built to alleviate congestion more often than not end up more congested than their predecessors. Ask folks on their way home from Albany on I-787, “What happens when you exit onto Alternate 7 and try to get on the Northway?”

As my favorite highway billboard pointed out, “You aren’t stuck in traffic. You are traffic.”

Three drafts of the EIS had been rejected. After the third draft of the EIS was rejected in 1975, bridge supporters scrambled to save the project. They went on a public relations offensive.

The project was marketed not just as a transportation fix, but as part of economic stimulus package that would revitalize downtown. The local proponents believed that the project would bring people *into* Troy. Opponents were just as convinced that it would reduce the time needed to access the new shopping malls that were a primary reason for the decline of Troy’s once vibrant downtown. NYSDOT officials were personally involved in making this argument publicly. Opponents countered that this road system would carry more people *out* of Troy to shop in the malls, than it would bring suburbanites in to shop in Troy.

On May 2, 1975 a fourth EIS was issued. It was signed by Roger H. Edwards, Deputy Chief Engineer for Design, NYS DOT. As with the prior versions, it contained an appendix with comments from both supporters and opponents. Extensive criticisms by Gary Nelson, TAP, the Town of Brunswick Conservation Advisory Council, Philip Clark, Rensselaer County Environmental Management Council, Professor Robert Palmer, (RPI School of Engineering), and William G. Halpin were included in the document. Three generally positive letters and one critique were dated 1974. All other correspondence was dated 1973. No subsequent comments from opponents were included, despite the substantial number of comments that were submitted.

At first, EIS IV didn’t fare much better than its predecessors. Judith T. Connor, Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation raised questions about the NYS DOT’s environmental impact statement in a memorandum dated November 17, 1975. The US DOT needed to approve the EIS for the project to receive Federal Money, which was 90% of the budget. The Connor Memorandum raised many of the same objections raised by those who criticized the first draft EIS. Among the points made:

- Alternatives need to be more thoroughly studied. “...explore the feasibility of more efficient use of the existing transportation system, including the Troy City street network and existing area bridges, as an alternative to the Hoosick Street Bridge.”
- Quoting NYSDOT’s impact statement which suggested that long range relief for downtown areas depends largely on mass transit, Ms. Connor called the bridge “an apparent short-term solution to the area’s transportation problems.”

- A projected 20-fold increase of traffic on Hoosick Street has not been adequately studied. *She was certainly right about that one.*
- More information is needed on noise pollution levels and their effect on surrounding areas.

The Connor Memorandum caused the NYSDOT to go back to the drawing board one more time, delaying the start of construction, which had been scheduled to begin in 1976 until 1977.

The DOT realized that the bridge would be delayed again; perhaps further scaled down, or even relocated. They had been tearing down buildings on Hoosick Street for more than a year without having an approved EIS. They had built a \$10 million dollar interchange eight years earlier that was lined up to put cars on a bridge to Hoosick Street. The coalition of groups opposing the project was growing. The opponents had made it clear that they were ready to bring a lawsuit if the EIS as written was ever approved. And so, the gloves came off.

1976

A Bad Year for Thoughtful and Concerned Troy Citizens

By this point TAP, Inc. had been involved in North South Arterial and Hoosick Street Bridge issues for nine years. I had been involved for the last four of those years as TAP's Executive Director. There had been some concessions on both sides, and there had been major reductions in the scope of the project since the giant 1968 interchange. The outlook was good; there was hope of further modifications to the bridge design. A coalition had formed with local support. An attorney was hired to represent the group in negotiations.

NYSDOT put together its response to the Connor Memorandum and called it an "insert", and with other additional information, sent it on to USDOT sometime in March of 1976 as a final version. It was submitted and approved with little or no time for comment. "Bulldozed through" seems the right phrase. The plaintiffs learned of this from their attorney, James M. Reilly, of the law firm Pattison, Herzog, Sampson & Nichols, P.C. Mr. Reilly had been notified by NYS DOT that a response was being prepared and they would be in contact. They were not. NYSDOT put together its "insert" and sent it on to USDOT without input from the Plaintiffs or any other public discussion. It was submitted to the US DOT where it was rapidly approved. The Federal support, especially the federal court support, evaporated.

This was quite surprising in the light of the contents of the "insert". At least from the point of view of the opposition, there was no stunning or compelling or even new information in that document. Objections to the term "insert" became one of nine claims made against the EIS IV by the Plaintiffs in the subsequent suit. They charged that NYS DOT invented the term "insert" as a dodge to avoid the more appropriate and normal term "supplement". They did that to avoid the clear mandate of 23 C.F.R 771.15 which states in part:

'A supplement is to be processed in the same manner as a new EIS (draft and final).'

This and other concerns listed in the Connor memorandum were ignored and the revised Final EIS was signed by Roger E Kirby Regional Federal Highway Administrator with the Insert included on April 27th, 1976. The approval of the EIS was granted on the fourth try, with help from an "insert" that never received a public hearing.

Stunned and saddened by his sudden turnaround, opponents were left with only one final shot: a lawsuit. With nothing to lose, they pulled the trigger. Having been stonewalled on most elements of public input, a lawsuit was filed by a coalition of opponents from several localities, challenging the approval of the fourth Environmental Impact Statement on May 20, 1976.

Negotiating Changes

Among the people trying to reach an agreement to end this fight was Congressman Ned Pattison, who was as good a congressman as our area ever had. He won thanks to hard work, the post-Watergate Democratic wave, a third party Conservative candidate, and an incumbent that did not take his challenger as seriously as he needed to. As a result, Pattison had two memorable terms (1975 through 1979) which included an admirable record of reasonableness, candor and accomplishment.

Pattison had begun meetings with local people about the road proposals in 1975. When the lawsuit was filed in May, he offered to mediate meetings between the parties. The negotiations, held in the Congressman's Troy office, began in July of 1976 and were held more or less monthly. Meetings included opponents, local proponents, NYSDOT officials, including Regional Director Charles Carlson, and several members of the Congressman's staff. Things were occasionally contentious, but generally, as we got down to brass tacks, became fairly businesslike.

The talks were also, to a limited extent, productive. A flyer that TAP put out in 1973 described, among other things, the parking removals which were part of the NYSDOT's ABC options for the bridge. This seemed to strike a nerve. Neighborhood residents, city council people and of course bridge opponents wanted the parking restored. The DOT agreed to modify the parking removals.

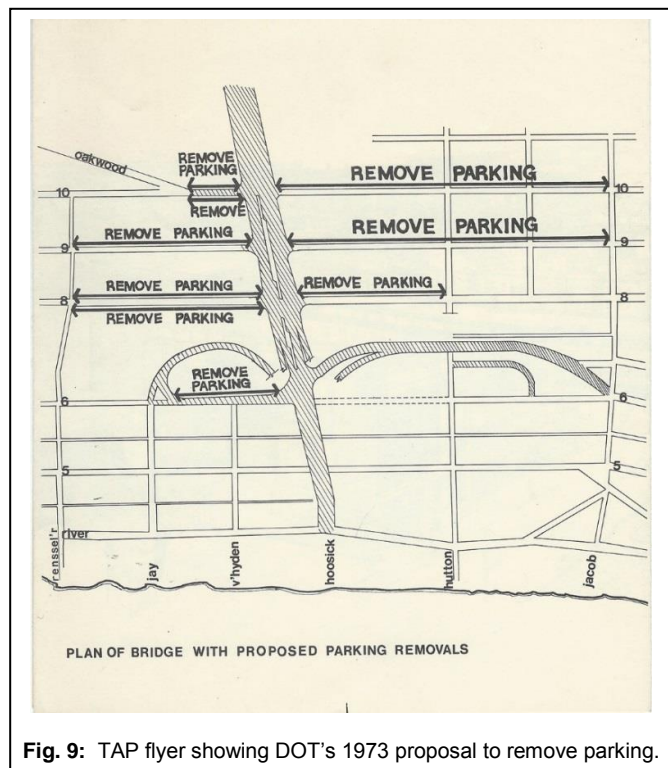


Fig. 9: TAP flyer showing DOT's 1973 proposal to remove parking.

The DOT was very willing to talk about creating playground and park space under the bridge. A very attractive set of proposals was developed by their landscape architect, Scott Lewendon. The Plaintiffs were appreciative of the proposal but asked that some portion of the area under the bridge be dedicated to parking in order to spur the redevelopment of the spaces to the north and south of bridge on lower Hoosick. This request was accommodated, and a few parking areas were included. After the bridge was built, more and more of the area was converted to parking. Most unfortunately, this included a well-used and spacious park at the shore line, directly under the bridge.

The Plaintiffs certainly didn't get everything they asked for. We asked if the bridge could land at the foot of River Street, to avoid the remaining ramps and the quartering of Troy's lowest income neighborhood. It would not be possible to land that quickly, we were told, because the bridge had to be high enough above the river to allow ships of a given height to pass. "What about a draw-bridge?" we asked. Not feasible. Draw-bridges were simply not built any more. Well, a funny thing happened to cast doubt on that remark. In 1977 the Green Island Bridge fell down. A new bridge was built (within four years); remarkably it was a draw bridge.⁶

The Plaintiffs also asked for pedestrian bridges over Hoosick Street from the Troy Plaza, and over the new Sixth Avenue at Hutton Street. The answer was unequivocal and quick to arrive: NO. The reason given was that people do not use pedestrian bridges to walk up over and down to avoid traffic. They remained unmoved by the argument that a bridge over Hoosick Street to connect the Troy Plaza with the top of the hill on the north side of Hoosick would be a straight shot, and there would be no stair on either side.

One issue in particular stands out. One of the parties to the suit was the United Urban Ministry (UUM), forerunner to the current Troy Area United Ministries (TAUM). UUM was represented at the negotiations by a staff member, the Reverend John Lyons. Reverend Lyons came into one meeting with a proposal for an all-traffic stop signal that would allow people to cross Hoosick at 10th Street. He speculated that due to excessive turning traffic, pedestrians would frequently find it impossible to safely cross either street. The NYSDOT engineers agreed to consider it.

⁶ Not everything bad that happens is a result of bad planning. Sometimes it's just bad luck. The old Green Island Bridge did not line up with Federal Street. It used to enter just north of Federal Street. Coming off the bridge you had to make a right and then a left to get onto Federal Street. Terrible traffic flow. Troy spent \$1.5 million dollars in 1976 to realign Federal Street so it lined up with the Bridge. The next year the Bridge fell. If it had fallen the year before, the new bridge could have lined up with the old Federal Street, and \$1.5 million would have been saved.

At our next meeting, they reported that they had analyzed the effect of an all-traffic-stop, and concluded that the projected traffic volumes could not be accommodated if all traffic had to stop for any amount of time. I remember clearly that Reverend Lyons said, “So you mean that no one will be able to ever cross the street safely at that corner.” There was no reply.

The Plaintiffs in the pending lawsuit had been directed to send all comments intended for the NYSDOT to City Manager John Buckley so that he would have a chance to comment. Reverend Lyons discovered in February that City Manager Buckley had never transmitted any of the joint position statements to the State. Turned out there was less good faith bargaining going on than we thought.

By September, the meetings at Congressman Pattison’s office were over.

1977

Collapse

Preliminary hearings on the trial of Brunswick Environmental Inc, et al, Plaintiffs, against William T. Coleman, Secretary of Transportation of the United States, et al. Defendants, began on April 4th of 1977. The City of Troy was named as “Intervenor”

The Plaintiffs in the case were:

Brunswick Environment Foundation, Troy Inner-City Neighborhood Centers, TAP, Walter Auclair: (Waterford Friends of the Environment), Rural Environment of Schaghticoke, George Yakel (United Urban Ministry of Troy, NY), Dean Leith, and Gary Nelson.

The Case was heard in Albany in the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York.

Judge James T. Foley, a Troy native, presided.⁷ The case was born under a bad star. One of the nine claims was that the Federal Highway Administration was required to participate in the preparation of the EIS. Jim Reilly, attorney for the plaintiff, recently told me the FHA claim was lost subsequent to the case being filed when, after a strong push from Hoosick Bridge supporters, Congress passed a regulation allowing the head of a state agency to prepare the EIS.

That little piece of bad news paled in comparison to the big blow. Most unfortunately for the Plaintiffs, the court case began just a few weeks after the collapse of the Green Island Bridge. Arguments to reconsider the scale of the bridge lost much of their power to persuade in the face of that disaster.

Proponents like Gary Nelson made a strong case for reconsidering the Green Island Bridge location as the primary access to Troy, and abandoning the Hoosick Street Bridge as an idea. That thought was rebuffed by state officials who scoffed at the idea of a lift bridge and insisted that only a bridge like the one proposed at Hoosick Street would suffice.

The court clearly agreed with the bridge proponents. Among other things the judge noted that “this Hoosick Street Bridge facility has been under consideration since the early 1950’s. He rejected arguments about “segmentation” and “piecemealing.” He also wrote that, “The urgency and importance of this matter was increased dramatically by the March 15, 1977 collapse of the Green Island Bridge” (less than three weeks before the trial began).

We had our day in court and we had our heads handed to us. Our fight was done. The bridge was built as proposed in Alternate CR-1. You could call it a win, if you compared it to the 1968 proposed cloverleaf, but even in its substantially reduced form it destroyed the commercial spine of the low-income area, and left Hoosick Street a traffic hazard and a traffic problem to this day. It opened for business on August 14, 1980 at a cost estimated by the NYS Department of Transportation at “approximately \$32 million.” (\$294 million in 2018 dollars).

⁷ Judge James T. Foley grew up in the house at 7 St. Mary’s Avenue in Troy. It was the very house that was purchased by the Esposito Family, and then by New York State in 1970 to make room for the North South Arterial. See page 10. He had a distinguished career as a Federal Judge. The Federal Court House on Broadway in Albany was renamed in his honor in 1988, after he retired from the bench.

Epilogue

What I think I learned.

- A good part of the reason that we can no longer maintain our roads and bridges is that they are substantially overbuilt. This overbuilding is a direct result of the over-funding from the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. The idea has been suggested in this article and many other places that portions of the interstate system are not only unattractive, they are counterproductive.

Several communities have eliminated ramps for use by cars by either dismantling them or repurposing them. For More See “Six Freeway Removals that Changed Their Cities Forever” which shows examples from San Francisco, California; Cheonggyecheon, Seoul; Harbor Drive, Portland; Park East, Milwaukee; Rio Madrid, Madrid; and Alaskan Way, Seattle.

<https://gizmodo.com/6-freeway-removals-that-changed-their-cities-forever-1548314937>

There is even talk in the Capital Region of decommissioning elevated roadways. Albany recently announced its intentions to thin the highway spaghetti that separates their City from the river. Troy’s recently released Strategic Plan suggests trimming the on and off ramps from the Congress Street Bridge.

- It is better to be lucky than smart, and it is even better to be connected than to be lucky. As 1975 ended, we who opposed the bridge were feeling pretty good. Suddenly as 1976 began, things quickly turned around. Our previously supportive federal reviewers and their tool box of regulations seemed to abruptly lose interest.

What changed? The Green Island Bridge collapse severely impacted our chances, but I am not at all sure we would have prevailed even if it had stayed up. I can tell you that the eleventh-hour maneuvering to get an “insert” into the EIS, the lack of public discussion and the sudden approval reversing four previous rejections, was the kind of thing I got used to in the subsequent four decades that I worked at TAP. Time after time we would seem to have Federal support in the form of firm directives to stick to the law, but our better connected opponents would snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Support would suddenly evaporated at the last minute after visits to Washington D.C. by local officials who pled their case personally. This ending was very typical of what happens when a

David meets a Goliath; Goliaths usually prevail. Bible stories are miracles after all; they are the exception, not the rule.

I always wondered what happened at those face to face negotiations. It is something I would dearly love to learn.

- The Hoosick Street Bridge, today known as the “Collar City Bridge” was opened to traffic on August 14, 1980. It is 38 years (2018) since the bridge opened. There have been people injured, and people killed on Hoosick Street. The corner of 10th and Hoosick, in particular, became a major public controversy. The signals have been changed several times to improve safety. The rate of accidents has declined as the changes get closer to an all-traffic stop called for by John Lyons in 1976

The Esek Bussey Firehouse is on the Northeast corner of Tenth and Hoosick Streets. When it was first threatened by the proposed bridge in 1973, the efforts of Troy resident and noted preservation architect John G. Waite resulted in it being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. NYSDOT was forced to change their plans for demolition in order to provide a wide smooth high-speed curve for cars headed up Oakwood. Instead, a hard right turn now helps slow traffic at one of the most dangerous intersections in the region. The car/pedestrian accident rate at that corner would have been even worse if the Bussey Firehouse had come down.

It is still a challenge to cross Hoosick Street anywhere below Burdett Avenue, and no picnic crossing above Burdett. Hoosick Street is widely regarded as a traffic nightmare. At drive times local drivers navigate around it by using other East/West streets as much as possible before funneling into Hoosick.

- One of the many things that has plagued Hoosick Street since the completion of the bridge is the disruption of the already too heavy traffic by frequent water and sewer main breaks. The nice things about Interstate Highway systems is that there is no municipal plumbing lines under the roadbed. The same cannot be said of the City Streets onto which the traffic dumps. In retrospect, the Hoosick Street “arterial” road improvements from 10th Street to South Lake, completed in 1966, should have included replacement of the ancient public utilities buried in the road bed.

- Troy, as usual, was unusual in its feistiness. Consequently, with regard to the damage done by the highway epidemic of the 1960's Troy is considerably better off than Rensselaer, Albany, Schenectady, and Amsterdam. Bridge and Arterial supporters during the fight constantly pointed out that all the surrounding communities were getting things built, while Troy was stalled. Today, those other communities all speak ruefully of the giant interchanges that cut them off from their riverfronts.
- There are also lessons here about institutional group-think. Over the course of this controversy I had an opportunity to interact with several people at various levels of the NYS DOT. In that group I found a fairly broad range of opinions. There were some who seemed to hate us for our 1960's hair and our left-wing ideas, and some who thought we were on the right side of the argument. A few even quietly encouraged us with a helpful piece of information here and there. None of them struck me as bad people. They all seemed to be trying to do the right thing as they saw it, within the context. But the massive coinciding of self-interest of State and Federal elected officials and agencies with the oil, paving and automotive giants, had already set the context. Any individual on that side of the table who stood up and quit his or her job in protest, might have felt better about themselves, but they would not have changed the outcome of the project one iota.

At one point in the middle of this controversy a reporter, sympathetic but amused by our efforts, told me that people like us were going to spend the rest of our lives winning small battles but losing the big ones. He was right, but what I came to realize was that accumulating a lot of little wins can change the context of the discussion. That's when thoughtful people still in the system gain enough clout to make big wins happen.

Today, the process of road building is much more deliberative. It is more constrained by the cluster of rules and regulations that make the gold rush days of the mid 1960's impossible to repeat. It would be institutionally unthinkable to segment a project into smaller pieces the way they routinely did in 1964.

There is also a concept getting increasing attention from road planners called "Complete Streets". As defined by Smart Growth America:

Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross

the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.

There is a new generation of road builders at NYS DOT who have a broader view of transportation and no longer think of improvement as simply meaning more and faster cars. Fewer people think that improving a road system means increasing the speed and number of automobiles it can carry. There is a whole community of people, many working for the State of New York, who, instead of only cars, also plan for pedestrians, bicyclists, and barrier free construction all under the umbrella of “Complete Streets.” They are now in a position to change the paradigm. While far from perfect, things are substantially better than the earliest days of the road building boom.

To paraphrase Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can make a terrible road proposal less terrible. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”